



# *The Right to Refuse to Kill*

The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection Newsletter (EBCO)

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*EXTRA ISSUE*

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## GREECE EXTRA

On 20 May 2008 LAZAROS PETROMELIDIS was convicted in absentia to three years imprisonment (!) without suspension for 2 charges of insubordination by the Naval Court of Piraeus. This means he is wanted once again and faces immediate imprisonment. On the occasion of his trial he published the article below in the Greek daily ***ELEFTHEROTYPIA***:



Intervention by LAZAROS PETROMELIDIS\*

“The country where I grew up invests in insecurity and fear”

I remember the junta. I remember the fear that the military regime spread in the poor neighbourhood of Drapetsona where I grew up. But that was not enough to deter the residents from defying the radio direction finders and gather every night at a different house to listen to the BBC and Deutsche Welle, even though a lot of them were branded as left wingers, already targets. I remember how upset the head-master of my school was, when once an officer of the junta visited us, his agony whether something might not go well and he gets in trouble.

I remember in the village of my father the conversations for the Bulgarian enemies, the “danger from the north”. I remember three thousand soldiers in Goumenissa and innumerable others in Polykastro, in Axioupoli, and in all the cities along the borders with the then “iron curtain”. And one morning we learnt that the Bulgarians and the Yugoslavians were not enemies any more, the enemies were others. They were not “from the north” any more, but “from the east”.

I saw conscript soldiers in the night clubs of Kilkis cutting with a pocket-knife, while dancing, one by one, slowly and ritually, the buttons of their uniform. I saw friends injuring themselves in order to postpone their enlistment time. Others, crying like babies in front of the bus taking them from the Naval Hospital back to the Palaskas training centre.

I went to marches, I laid wreaths at statues of heroes, I carried the flag as a head pupil, I recited nation-binding poems, at school plays I played the monk who blew up Kugi. I saw my uncle in the mobilisation of '74 being called up to fight with four bullets. I heard my cousin narrating to me the panic, the cries and the farewells of the soldiers, when in '87 in Alexandroupoli they were called up to prepare for real battle. And if all these are old stories, I can see what happens nowadays. I see the country where I grew up and live being among the first in the world in armaments and purchases of useless war material. I see the agony of a system which, in order to be kept alive, has launched war with invisible enemies and with the only existing one, the society, trying to keep it captive in its own terms and needs while desperately searching to find ways to maintain its privileges.

I see how nationalism is created. I see segments of the Greek population referring to their neighbours with the terms “Gypsy-Skopians” and “Mongolians”. I see twelve children a bit older than my son committing suicide in the army during the previous year and four more this year. Children who, as soon as they return from a modern form of mass kidnapping of children - as it was the case with the occupied populations during the ottoman times to be trained as soldier - may be forced to migrate in order to make a living, as their grandfathers did fifty years ago and as it happens already in the poor social classes of Thrace.

I see the country where I grew up and live investing not in social cohesion, but in insecurity and fear. Following a development model based on the existence of an enormous, in proportion to its population, army, of a parasitic military bureaucracy and useless military installations that strip away precious productive resources and depriving any possibility of rational and sustainable social development.

I do not want heroes, I do not want statues, I do not want chimeras, illusions, imaginary enemies and cultivated myths. I do not want other marches, other armies, other nationalist ideas. I do not want deterrent or defensive doctrines, in my 45 years I have already experienced lots of them. I want life, future, hope for the children of all of us. And I want my course not to be destroyed any more from incapable governors, who are unable to even keep pace with their times. For these I am being judged, for these we are all being judged.

For our need and at the same time our demand to say these things openly, to discuss them with others, to recognize these not as facts but as issues, to remove the cover of silence that keeps public debate at bay. Anyone who wants nationalism and militarism, hate and intolerance, backwardness and manipulation, let them have them. I will not be with them. I have finished.

For the substance of my case: Since, 34 years after the fall of the junta, the military courts still continue to prosecute citizens, it's implied that I will not attend court. If my trial takes place and I am indeed convicted in absentia, I declare that without the least reservation I will practise whatever moral and human right results from me being a father, a son, a partner, a colleague, a friend, and above all a free and thinking citizen.

\* Conscientious objector, 45-year old, on trial today for the 15<sup>th</sup> time.

*ELEFTHEROTYPIA - 20/05/200*

[http://www.enet.gr/online/online\\_text/c=112.id=60518296](http://www.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=112.id=60518296)